

AUTHENTICK
MEMOIRS
OF THE
LIFE

A.L.
W.W.

Of that celebrated ACTRESS
Mrs. ANN OLDFIELD.

CONTAINING
A genuine ACCOUNT of her
TRANSACTIONS from her Infancy
to the Time of her Decease.

*See here the Fair One, whose engaging Art
Cou'd charm each Ear, and captivate each Heart.*

The THIRD EDITION,
WITH
Large Additions and Amendments.

L O N D O N

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AUTHENTIC

MEMOIRS

OF THE

LIFE

OF

CHARLES

WILKINS



BY

JOHN

WILKINS

ESQ.

OF THE

BRITISH MUSEUM



TO THE
R E A D E R.

THE two former Editions of Authentick Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Ann Oldfield, having met with such good Success from the Town, has given us Encouragement to publish this Third Edition ; which, we hope, will be the more acceptable to our Readers, by reason that there is several material Circumstances communicated to us by creditable Persons since the Publication of the two former Impressions, which will render

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der

ii To the READER.

der the Account of her Life more compleat.

IT is needless to repeat the Circumstances that are inserted in this Edition that were not in the last; let it suffice, that we have received a Letter signed T. H. which makes a Discovery of divers of her Actions in her juvenal Years.





T O

Mr. *ROBERT WILKS.**S I R,*

BEING about to collect some
Memoirs of the Life of the
inimitable Mrs. *OLDFIELD*, I
thought I cou'd not inscribe it to
a more proper Person than Mr.
WILKS; for whom cou'd I better
choose for a Patron to the most ac-
complish'd Actress of her Sex, than
that Person who is universally
allowed to be the *Nonpareil* of
his?

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WHERE-

iv *DEDICATION.*

WHEREFORE, Sir, I hope the following Sheets will not prove an unacceptable Offering to You, as it is the Account of a Person with whom You have spent many agreeable Hours, and lived in such an Intimacy several Years, as must necessarily render You no Stranger to her Worth.

As no Man living cou'd ever pretend to come in Competition with Mr. WILKS; so never had a fine Actor a more agreeable Partner in almost every Character wherein She appear'd upon the Stage: And whenever Sir *Harry Wildair*, Lady *Lurewell*, Captain *Plume*, and *Sylvia*, once trod the Stage, 'twas universally agreed they never wou'd be equalled.

As

DEDICATION. v

As no One, Sir, is a better Judge than Yourself of Mrs. OLDFIELD's Excellencies; so, I believe, no One will set a greater Value upon her Memory, or be more sensible of her Loss; since in her You have lost the only Counterpart who was fit to tread the Stage with Mr WILKS. To enumerate all the Characters wherein She shin'd were to recite all the Parts She ever acted; and, I believe, to be second to her is the utmost Ambition of any One She has left behind her.

THE great Mrs. *Barry*, and the celebrated Mrs *Bracegirdle*, have been each of them transmitted down to Posterity by several able Pens; and, I hope, no One will dispute
Mrs.

Mrs. OLDFIELD's deserving the same Justice, who has ever seen her upon the Theatre.

BUT perhaps it will be thought by Some impertinent in me to dwell so much upon her Perfections, when I am addressing myself to One who is so vastly better acquainted with them than I can pretend to be; yet, I hope, Sir, You will not deem this small Tribute to her Memory superfluous, since it is no more than what is Her due from every Writer who has a Value for just Action; and if the *Romans*, the greatest and most polite Nation in the Universe, thought fit to perpetuate the Memory of *Roscius*, why may We not be allowed to pay the same

DEDICATION. vii

same Compliment to the Memory
of Mrs. OLDFIELD?

How have I seen the crouded
Audience hang with Attention up-
on her Tongue, and devour her
with their Eyes, whenever She ap-
pear'd! How significant was her
every Motion and Gesture! How
musical and enchanting her Deli-
very! Infomuch that I have been
inform'd that several Poets have
found new Graces in their own
Works, when pronounc'd by her;
and have own'd, that in her Action
She surpass'd all the Instructions
they could have given her.

IF Merit in the greatest Degree
could have been any Security a-
gainst Death, then Mrs. OLDFIELD
as well as Mr. WILKS, would have
bid

viii *D E D I C A T I O N.*

bid fair for Immortality: But, alas! that Tyrant spares neither the Witty nor the Fair; and whenever he calls We must resign to Fate.

NEITHER was She more the universal Delight of the best Judges, than Mr. WILKS has always been of the whole Town; and that he may long continue to be so is the general Wish of all Mankind; and, amongst the rest, of none more than his

Very humble Servant,

The *AUTHOR.*



AUTHENTICK
MEMOIRS
OF
Mrs. ANN OLDFIELD.



HE Lives of celebrated Comedians have always been received as an agreeable Amusement by the Publick; wherefore, 'tis to be hoped, that the following Account of an inimitable Actress, who has a long Series of Time maintain'd an incontestable Superiority over all her Contemporaries, and been the universal Delight
C of

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of the *Beau Monde*, will meet with as favourable Quarter from the Town, as either the facetious Mr. *Spiller's*, or honest *Penkethman's*, of merry Memory.

HER Talents for genteel Comedy was, I believe, never surpassed, if equalled by any One; and whoever has seen her act *Andromache* in the *Distress'd Mother*, must allow She was an excellent Tragedian.

HER Person was infinitely graceful, her Nature majestick, her Behaviour so enchanting, and her Conversation so agreeable, that, during her whole Life, She was in the highest Esteem with Persons of the greatest Wit and Quality in the Kingdom.

IN her private Capacity She was a Woman of uncommon Generosity and good Nature; so that She never sent away dissatisfy'd any unfortunate Person who ever apply'd to her for any Favour, especially if they were endued with a liberal Education.

BUT as in the writing her Life we must begin before her appearance upon
the

Mrs. ANN OLDFIELD. II

the Stage; we shall endeavour to give the World the most authentick Memoirs that could possibly be procured of the most material Occurrences that ever happen'd to her from her Infancy.

As various have been the Scenes thro' which She pass'd, before She acquir'd that establish'd Character to which She at last arriv'd, we flatter ourselves the Readers will find it an acceptable Entertainment; the more, inasmuch as we shall adhere strictly to Matters of Fact, and not interperse this Work with a heap of fictitious Forgeries and Inconsistencies; as is too often done in Productions of this Nature.

WE shall therefore spare neither Cost nor Pains to render our Memoirs compleat; and hope accordingly they will meet with better Encouragement than those spurious Accounts, which never fail being trump'd up on the like Occasions, and are sure to accompany the Deaths of any eminent Persons.

WHEREFORE, as we don't suppose Mrs. Oldfield's Memory will meet with
any

any better Quarter from these Gentry than Others who have gone before her; we will endeavour to rescue her from their Clutches, and put her into such a Dress, as may fit her once more to appear in, and be the Delight of, the best Company. Not that we shall pretend to set her off to so much Advantage as She appear'd when She charm'd the Eyes and Ears of all Beholders; that is a Task to which we confess ourselves not equal: However, we will take care to strip her of as few of her native Beauties as possible; and tho' the Picture does not come up to the Original, we will at least not fail to make it a tolerable Copy.

JUST as I prophesy'd, I have now seen an Advertisement, desiring Hints to be sent to *Hurt's* Coffee-house in the *Strand*, to one *William Egerton*, who no doubt will pack together a gross Collection of Absurdities, and palm them upon the Town for Hints sent by Persons of Credit and Reputation. This same *William Egerton* being only a fictitious Name, to cover some wretched blind Author,

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Author, who is afraid to set his real one, for fear his Character should damn his Performance.

To shew I am not mistaken in what the Town is to expect from Mr. *Egerton*, and to give a Specimen of his Performance, even in his Advertisement, he has not been able so much as to spell her Name right; or had Credit enough with any One to set him right in so trivial a Circumstance; for nothing is more certain, than that She always wrote it *Ann* without an *E*, whereof he might have informed himself, had he had but Interest enough to procure the Sight of any one Letter or Receipt under her Hand.

To begin then: Her Grandfather, who was born of honest and reputable Parents, was put out Apprentice to a Vintner; and in that Station always behaved himself in such a Manner, as gained both the Approbation and Good-will of his Master, and was very obliging to all his Customers. He had not been long out of his Time, before he set up for himself, and took the *George Tavern*, now an Alehouse, over-

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against

against the *Cocoa Tree* in *Pall-Mall*, where his Behaviour was so engaging and his Usage so good, that he quickly drew Crouds of the best Company, and consequently was not long before (to use a common Expression) he got the Forehorse by the Head, and throve amain. Accordingly, he not only bought the House wherein he lived, but two more adjoining to it, and entirely rebuilt them from the Ground.

As he lived long enough afterwards to gain a very handsome Fortune, besides this Estate, by his Business, and had but two Sons living, thinking the Eldest wou'd be otherwise well enough provided for, he, at his Decease, left these three Houses, worth then between Sixty and Seventy Pounds *per Annum*, to his youngest Son, who was the Father to our celebrated Mrs. *Ann Oldfield*.

THIS Gentleman being, as may be imagined, of not altogether so parsimonious and lucrative a Temper as his deceased Father, did not enjoy this Estate long, before he first mortgaged and after
fold

fold it outright to his elder Brother. Accordingly it is now in the Possession of the said elder Brother's Son, Mr. *George Oldfield*, a *Hosier*, in *St. James's-Street*, near *St. James's Gate*, who is first Cousin to the deceas'd Mrs. *Ann Oldfield*. After the Sale of this Estate, her Father, being willing, as 'tis supposed, to put himself in some Way of living with the Money, bought towards the latter End of the late King *James's* Reign, into the *Horse-Guards*, and continued in that Post till his Death, which happen'd not many Years after.

AFTER his Decease, his Family (consisting of a Widow and one young Daughter, the Heroine of our Story) not being left in a very flourishing Condition, his elder Brother abovementioned, took Compassion on the Girl, and resolved to give her some Education. To this purpose he put her to School, where She soon took her Learning with admirable Proficiency, and must, in Time, have made great Progress in all the Accomplishments suitable to her Sex : But she had not been long
D 2 there,

there, before she discovered such an invincible Inclination to become an Actress upon the Stage, that no Persuasions, Admonitions, or even Threatnings of her Mother and Friends (who were all to the last Degree averse to her engaging in such a Profession) cou'd deter her from it.

HER Uncle, in order to keep her from going Abroad after she had got a little Learning, made her his Bar-Keeper, in which Place she continued not long before she enamour'd the Heart of a Gentleman who frequented the House; and soon after she left her Uncle and went and lived with the said Gentleman. But at present we shall leave her a little in this Disposition, and say something of her Mother.

THIS Gentlewoman being left almost destitute by her Husband, did for some Years after his Death follow the Business of a Mantua-Maker to support herself, (her Daughter being provided for, as was before observed) and upon her Daughter's admittance into the Playhouse she was recommended to be a Maker of Habits

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Habits for the Actresses. In this Station her Mother continued some Years, till her Daughter's Fortune and Salary being increased considerably, she thought proper to take her from that State and Dependence, and allowed her a competent Maintenance out of her own Income, till the Day of her Death.

UPON this Allowance the old Gentlewoman, quitting the said Employment of making Playhouse Habits, has lived ever since very private, and now dwells with her Sister in *Cambridge-street* near *Broad-street, Golden Square*; and we are undoubtedly informed, that her Daughter, of whom we are now treating, has, by her last Will and Testament, considerably augmented her Allowance, and settled it upon her as an Annuity during her Life.

To return now to the deceas'd Mrs. *Oldfield*: Her first Appearance upon the Stage was in the Year 1697, at the Theatre Royal in *Drury-Lane*, then under the Direction of Mr. *Rich*, Father to the present Proprietor of *Lincoln's-Inn-Fields* Play-

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Playhouse. The first Character she ever appear'd in upon the Stage was that of *Candiope* in the *Maiden Queen*, which she perform'd at *Drury-Lane Theatre* for the Benefit of *Mrs. Kent*.

SHE was first introduced into the Company of *Mr. Rich* by *Sir John Vanbrugh*, who being charm'd with her Voice and graceful Delivery, immediately took a Fancy to her, and received her into the Company acting under his Patent, where copying after those inimitable Actresses *Mrs. Barry* and *Mrs. Bracegirdle*, she soon improved so much beyond his Expectation, that he was quickly sensible he should not be deceiv'd in his Judgment, or have any Reason to repent his having brought her upon the Stage: In short, to say all in a few Words, she soon gave promising Hopes of being *Mrs. Oldfield*, that is, the Delight of the Age wherein she liv'd, and all that can be summ'd up in a Woman of her Profession.

Not many Years after her being received into this Theatre, a great Difference hap-

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happen'd between Mr. *Rich* and one Mr. *Swinny*. In short, the Misunderstanding came to such a Height, that all Endeavours to reconcile them proved fruitless, and one of them was obliged of Necessity to quit the Field. Things being at this pass, it fell to the Lot of Mr. *Swinny* to remove his Habitation, and great Endeavours, as may be well imagined, were used on both Sides to gain over the best of the Players to their Interest.

AMONGST these the deceas'd Mrs. *Oldfield*, who began already to be very famous, did not fail of being strenuously courted by both Parties; but, however, notwithstanding what Arguments Mr. *Rich* could use, Mr. *Swinny*'s happen'd to be at that Time most prevailing; and no wonder, for he was an *Irishman*, and the Gentlemen of that Country are generally reputed to be Masters of very persuasive Inducements to gain the Fair Ones over to their Party.

Not long after, as Mrs. *Oldfield* daily improved in her Profession, a Dispute was
set

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set on Foot (whether first started between themselves or by the Town, I will not pretend to determine) whether she or Mrs. *Bracegirdle*, who was then the most Celebrated Actress at that Time, could best perform a Part in Comedy. This Contest, however it first began, grew at last so considerable, that 'twas agreed to make the Town the Judges: Accordingly, *The Amorous Widow*; or, *The Wanton Wife*, was pitch'd upon as the Play; and to determine this important Point, 'twas order'd that it should be acted two Nights successively, and that Mrs. *Bracegirdle*, as being the Senior, should have the Preference of the first Night, and play the *Wanton Wife*, which same should the next Night be performed by Mrs. *Oldfield*: Never did that not as yet forgotten Contest between the Signoras *Cuzzini* and *Faustina* keep the *Beau Monde* more in anxious Suspense, or occasion more Effusion among the *Toupees*, and fluttering of *Fans* among the *Ladies*, than this Emulation of our Heroines did in the *Beaux* and *Belles* of those Times.

THE

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THE long expected Night being come, the Senior Championess appear'd, attended with such a Croud of *Beaux* as might be expected from a long unrivall'd Superiority, and perform'd her Part, as usual, to such Admiration, as inspir'd a Confidence into all her Friends, and made Mrs. *Oldfield's* well Wishers dread the Issue would not be in her favour. However, the next Night, when our Heroine graced the Stage, and had spoke but ten Lines, such was the gracefulness and beauty of her Person, so enchanting the harmony of her Voice and justness of her Delivery, and so inimitable her Action, that she charm'd the whole Audience to that Degree, they almost forgot they had ever seen Mrs. *Bracegirdle*, and universally adjudged her the Preheminence; which very much disgusted her celebrated Antagonist; and Mrs. *Oldfield's* Benefit being allowed by Mr. *Swinny* to be in the Season before Mrs. *Bracegirdle's*, added so much to the Affront, that she quitted the Stage immediately. Ever since that time Mrs. *Oldfield* has maintained an undisputed Sovereignty

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over all her Contemporaries on every Theatre where-ever she perform'd.

ABOUT 25 Years ago Mr. *Rich* prevailed on Mrs. *Oldfield* to leave the *Hay-Market*, and come to the Theatre in *Drury-Lane* again, wherein he then was concern'd; accordingly she did so; and whoever happened to be Managers or Proprietors of that House after Mr. *Rich*, she could not be persuaded to quit it, but continued constant to it to her last. Here it was she shone in full Glory, and appeared like the Sun in its Meridian Altitude, and dazzled the Eyes as well as charm'd the Hearts of all Beholders. What *Anchoret* that has ever seen her act *Letitia* in the *Old Batchelour*, but cou'd heartily have wished himself in *Belmour's* Place to have been the happy Man! Who that has seen her *Constantia* in the *Chances*, but has envy'd *Don John*, and would, like him, have fought an Army to have secured her to himself! Who that has seen her *Angelica* in *Love for Love*, but would, like *Valentine*, have made away with all to have obtained her!

her ! Or who that has seen her *Lady Brute* in the *Provok'd Wife*, but would have given a Province to have been the *Worthy* to enjoy her ! In short, let her have been either the *Lady Lurewell* in the *Constant Couple*, or Mrs. *Sullen* in the *Stratagem*, and any Man of Flesh and Blood would have sacrificed a King's Ransom to change Places with either the *Beau* or the *Footman*; so irresistible was she in every Character she personated.

BUT perhaps some *Cynick* will pretend to say, that these were only trivial ludicrous Characters, and that she was not equal to any thing Serious nor Sublime ; if such a Person has ever seen her act *Andromache* or *Jane Shore*, he would hardly ever be to be forgiven ; but if he has once beheld her in the inimitable Person of *Calista*, in Mr. *Rome's Fair Penitent*, and could remain unmoved, I believe all Mankind will own that he will not be so much intitled to Sublimity, as a Brute, nor much more than a Stone. Never again will the ravish'd Town be charm'd with such a *Calista*, nor ever had a *Lothario* such an

Excuse for transgressing: In fine, whilst *Drury-Lane Theatre* lasts, never will that Character be so exquisitely performed, as it was by the never to be forgotten, and too much lamented *Mrs. Oldfield*.

SOME Years after her Appearance upon this Theatre, an Incident happened, which will always be mentioned to *Mrs. Oldfield's* Honour, as it is the most distinguishing Proof both of her Charms, Merit, and Integrity that ever could be given to a Person in her Station. 'Twas this: *Mr. Manwaring*, a Gentleman of one of the best Families in *Great-Britain*, as well as a Man of the most exquisite and refin'd Taste, and most unquestion'd Judgment; in a Word, one whose Company was courted by the greatest Quality of both Sexes, and whose Works will be the Standard of good Writing as long as Wit, Humour, and Elegance bear any Value in our Island: This Gentleman, I say, being first infinitely charm'd with *Mrs. Oldfield's* Performances on the Stage, and finding afterwards, when occasionally in her Company, that her Conversation was the most agreeable that could
be

be imagin'd, and that she had Turns of Wit, and a natural Justness of Thought superior to her Sex, selected her from all the Fair Part of the Creation that graces our Isle (and in that I believe I may say two thirds of the Universe) to be his Bosom Companion, and share his Joys and Cares ; in short, to be the Partner of his softer Hours, when disingaged from busy Coxcombs, and deny'd to both the Great, Vulgar, and the Small.

Now I would fain ask any snarling Critick, or grave Idiot, what greater Compliment could be paid to the most exalted of her beauteous Sex, than for a Man of unequalled Wit and Judgment, who might have chosen from almost all the Daughters of our Mother *Eve* which adorn this Isle, to give the Preference to Mrs. *Oldfield*? Never, I fear again, will any One in her Station be able to give the same Proof of their Charms and Merit. Now for her Honour and Integrity, wherein she will be found to vye it not excel the most indulgent Mother, and the severest Prude, with all but those whose narrow

narrow Souls, moving always in the same Sphere, will not give Grains of Allowance to those whose excentric Genius move above their Orb, that is to say, to those whose petty Failings have superiour Excellencies to all such Cavillers: The same Gentleman upon a mature Judgment, form'd from his having been a Witness of her Behaviour for several Years, being snatch'd away in the Prime of his Age, (to the great Regret of all who had the Happiness to know him) and leaving behind him one Son, the only Fruits of their mutual Affection, and Heir to all his Father's Qualities, thought he cou'd not intrust him nor a handsome Fortune, to the Care of a more prudent Woman or a fonder Mother.

ACCORDINGLY at his decease he made her whole and sole Executrix to his Will; and left his Estate, amounting to between six and seven Hundred Pounds *per Annum*, in Trust with her, for the Use of his Son, till he should arrive to the Years of One and Twenty, and the Interest in the mean time to herself, allowing him a handsome

some Maintenance and Education. And pray, how has she discharged this Trust? Why after giving him an Education superior to most of our modern Quality, she has bought him an honourable Commission in the Guards; and at her decease, as a Testimony of her motherly Affection, bequeathed him the Interest of Five Thousand Pounds during his Life, to revert at his Death to his younger Brother. Blush ye rigid virtuous Women! Blush all ye sanctify'd Prudes! who being left Guardians to your Children, marry second Husbands, and thoughtless of your first Brood, suffer your Spouses, for the sake of a Bedfellow, to waste your Childrens Patrimony, and bring them to the Parish. But I have not as yet done with her Character upon this Head.

SEVERAL Years after this Gentleman's decease, *Mrs. Oldfield*, whose Company grew daily more agreeable, and in whole Beauty Time had not made any alteration but what was for the better, had again the good Fortune to captivate a General Officer in the Army, nearly ally'd to one
of

of the most Illustrious Families in *Europe*, and universally allowed to be a Person of as great Accomplishments as any of his Rank. By this Gentleman has Mrs. *Oldfield* left one Son, a fine Youth of about nine Years of Age, and of uncommon Qualifications, the mutual hope and darling of his fond and indulgent Parents; and to shew he was no less a sharer in her maternal Affections, nor less eminently her Care than his Brother before-mentioned, she has not only left him the Reversion of the Five Thousand Pounds after his said Brother's decease, but she has made him Heir to her fine House in *Grosvenor-street*, which cost her about six Years ago Two thousand two hundred Pounds, together with all the rich and valuable Furniture belonging thereto, and her Jewels, worth in all about Eleven Thousand Pounds; and all the remainder of her Real and Personal Estate whatsoever, after her Debts, Legacies and Funeral Charges are defrayed, and to secure this firm to him, she has left his Father Joint-Executor of her Will, with Three more Gentlemen of
Probity

Probity and Honour; leaving to each of them but Twenty Pounds a-piece for their Trouble, if they will please to accept the same.

AND now let any One tell me by what more amiable Qualities could the most exalted Character have distinguished herself, than by the greatest Integrity and Honour, and the most sincere and inviolable Friendship where she profess'd it, and the most tender and uncommon Affection and Regard to the Welfare of her Children?

THERE is one material Circumstance comes now afresh into my Memory, which I shall relate without the least Partiality, notwithstanding it was a very ungenerous Action done by the deceas'd *Mrs. Oldfield*, but, for ought I know, it might have been the only one she was ever guilty of. The Reason of my inserting it, is, because I would adhere strictly to my Title Page; and besides, it is always necessary when any One undertakes to relate the Series of a Person's Life, that they should expose the Bad Circumstances

F

with

with the Good ones, that the Readers may be Judges of their Transactions.

ONE Mr. F---, who had a very considerable Place in his Majesty's Customs, being enamour'd with Mrs. *Oldfield*, (who at the same Time had a Wife and Children) he informed her of his Passion, which she acquiesced to gratify. Upon this Account the Gentleman left his Family, and took entirely to Mrs. *Oldfield*; but e're long she left him, and went to the Honourable Gentleman who has been before mentioned.

NOW whether or no Mrs. *Oldfield* left Mr. F--- because she would not wrong his Family, or else that she had a better liking to the other Gentleman, is at present out of my Power to determine; but so far is certain, that she often perswaded him to return to his Family again.

BUT before we entirely take our Leave of Mrs. *Oldfield*, we will once more consider her in her proper Sphere, the Stage. Here we are credibly inform'd that a few Months after Mr. *Manwaring's* decease,

decease, it fell to her Lot to speak that celebrated Epilogue to Mr. *Philips's Distress'd Mother*, written by *Eustace Budgell, Esq;* Upon which Occasion, having introduced her Son by that Gentleman, who was then a Child upon the Stage, she spake these two Lines with inimitable Humour, pointing to the Boy when she said, *Sty* :

*Whilst I, his Relict, made at one bold firs
Myself a Princess, and young STY a King.*

THE Town was the more charm'd herewith, because there was then some Similitude between the Circumstances of *Andromache* and herself, both having lost a Friend and Patron, and both having made their Fortunes.

ANOTHER Circumstance likewise may not be improper to be here inserted, viz. That his present Majesty, upon the Death of the late Sir *Richard Steele*, conferred upon her the Patent for the Theatre Royal in *Drury-Lane*, which had formerly been given to that Gentleman.

NEITHER can we omit taking Notice, that never any Actress within the Memory of Man, (nor I believe before) met with such Encouragement as Mrs. *Oldfield*; which is no small Proof of the Excellency of her Performing in every Character; since from about One hundred and fifty Pounds *per Annum*, which was the most of her Allowance upon her first coming to *Drury-Lane Theatre*, it was several Times augmented to that Degree, that some Years before her Death it amounted to about Five Hundred Pounds *per Annum*, a Price never before given to any one. Nay, what was more extraordinary, it was inserted in her Articles that she should never be obliged to Act, without she pleas'd herself, after the last Day of *April*. Besides which, on her own Benefit Nights, the Expences of the House, which to others amount to about Fifty Pounds, were always given her.

HER last Benefit was on *Thursday, March 19, 1729-30*: when she acted the Part of *Calista* in Mr. *Rowe's Fair Penitent*; and the Part of *Lothario* was per-

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perform'd by a Gentleman for his own Diversion. The new Tragedy of *Sophonisba* was to have been acted for her Benefit, but was alter'd by Command of their Majesties, who were present, together with the Prince of *Wales*, and the rest of the Royal Family, to see it acted. This Character she perform'd, as usual, that is to say, inimitably; and she appear'd with such a noble Grandeur in her Person, that it were to be wish'd some of our modern Ladies of Quality could learn in their Turn to personate *Mrs. Oldfield*: So infinitely did the Copy transcend the Original, and so much more amiable did they appear when represented by *Mrs. Oldfield*, than when at home with their Lords.

AFTER this she continued acting till *Tuesday* the 28th Day of *April* following, when she performed the Part of *Lady Brute* in *Sir John Vanbrugh's Provoked Wife*; which was acted that Night for the Benefit of *Mr. Clarke* and *Miss Raster*.

THIS

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THIS being, according to her Articles, as we have already observed, the last Month that she was obliged to act for the Season, she never came to the Play-house afterwards. Nor indeed cou'd she, had she been inclined to have appeared there; for not long after her leaving *Drury-Lane*, she was seized with a lingering Sickness, which, tho' she had her lucid Intervals, when she was much better in Health than at other Times, never left her till it had carryed her to her Grave.

DURING this her last Illness, she was frequently attended by the most eminent Physicians, who having long in vain try'd their utmost Art and Skill, finding the Disease baffled the Force of their choicest Medicines, advis'd her, as the last Remedy, to try the Benefit of the Country Air. Accordingly she took Lodgings at *Hampstead*, where she continued some Time; but whether that Air, which is very searching, prov'd too sharp for her Distemper; or whether it was grown to a too uncontrollable height, she there
felt

felt such exquisite racking Pains, that 'twas past the Patience of the greatest Stoick, or the Constancy of the boldest Hero, to have born them without complaining, and that loudly too, of their sufferings: And indeed, in the Agony of her Pains, they did force such dismal Shrieks and Outcries from her, that the Neighbourhood beginning to be alarm'd at the unusual Noise, 'twas thought proper to remove her to her own House in *Grovesnor-street*.

HERE the noble Gentleman, who has been long known to have had an extraordinary Value for her, sat up with her at first for several Nights without intermission; and that so long, till Nature being no longer able to bear the uncommon Fatigue, it had like to have brought a dangerous Indisposition upon himself. Wherefore he was at last prevailed upon to forbear such a constant Attendance, tho' he never fail'd visiting her very frequently to the Time of her Death.

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FINDING that Death was unavoidable, some time before her decease, she began in earnest to prepare for it, like a Woman of both admirable Sense, and a good Christian. For having first settled all her worldly Affairs, by making her Will, she dedicated the rest of her Time to the Thoughts of a future State, and endeavour'd by a sincere Repentance to make all the Attonement that lay in her Power for a Mispent Life; and indeed how could it be expected otherwise, from a Person who had been from her Youth immerced in Vanity, surrounded with Flattery, and inur'd to a profuse Way of living? Most Women, I believe, in her Condition would have done as much, few would have done better, and many would have done much worse. However, after having long lain in the greatest Torment, she at last died an exemplary Penitent, on *Friday* the 23d Day of *October*, 1730, about Two of the Clock in the Morning, aged 47 Years, being born in the Year 1683.

AFTER her Decease, her Corpse was removed on *Monday* the 26th Day of the said

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said Month of *October* in the Evening from her House in *Grosvenor-Street*, to the *Jerusalem* Chamber in *Westminster Abbey*, where it lay in State the next Evening, and late that Night was interr'd in the said *Abbey* in great Funeral Pomp. The Supporters of her Pall being the Lords *Deaumar* and *Harvey*, Mr. *Carey*, Mr. *Hedges*, Mr. *Dorrington*, and Captain *Elliot*.

SHE made a Will, as I have already observ'd, and dy'd very Rich, having left a great many Legacies besides those that have been before-mentioned to her Friends and Relations.

THUS having conducted this celebrated Actress to her last Obsequies, we can only observe in general, that she was a Woman of admirable good Qualities, with some few Failings; and if those rigid Ladies who are so very exact in Point of Chastity cannot overlook that Transgression in her, I would advise them to imitate her in her Perfections, otherwise I will assure them, that 'tis very possible for a Woman of the nicest Virtue in that one Point, to make a more intolerable Wife, a more reproachable

G

38 *The LIFE of*

proachable Mother, a more worthless Friend, a more disagreeable Companion, and in a Word, a more good-for-nothing Creature altogether, than the most abandoned Woman in that one Respect only in *England*; and we shall conclude with saying, that if they don't care to give any Grains of Allowance to the Temptations wherewith she was surrounded, nor think it an Excuse for living like her, we hope they won't take it amiss if we offer them this little Piece of Advice, which is, to be very careful to die like her.

*When mourning OLDFIELD on her Death-bed lay,
OLDFIELD the Fair, the Witty and the Gay :
Thus to her Friends around her did she cry,
Live not like OLDFIELD, but like OLDFIELD dye.*

London, Nov. 4, 1730.

N. B. WE have just now received a Letter signed T. H. which contains a Circumstance of Mrs. *Oldfield's* Life that we were not before acquainted with; but

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but coming too late to be inserted in its proper Place, we hope it will not be unacceptable to entertain our Readers with at the latter End of these Memoirs.

To begin then: When *Mrs. Oldfield* was at the Theatre in the *Hay-Market*, under the Direction of *Mr. Swinny*, a certain late Noble Duke took a great Fancy to her, and waited on her at her Lodgings: But she being then young, and not very well skill'd in the Art of Rhetorick, did so much Affront his Grace, that he went away from her without making her any Present. Of this Misunderstanding *Mrs. Oldfield* presently acquainted *Mr. Swinny*, who immediately wrote a Letter to his said Grace, which she made a Transcript of and sent to him, giving his Grace a second Invitation, which his Grace accepted of, and waited on her accordingly; but as for what pass'd between them I know not, or if I did, perhaps it might not be convenient to insert it.

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I hope this Paragraph will not be taken amiss, because we have repeated this Story from the Contents of the Letter that was sent us.

An EPITAPH on Mrs. Ann Oldfield.

THE Boxes Charmer, and the Pit's Delight,
By cruel Death now ravish'd from our Sight,
Here OLDFIELD lies; in that one single Name
All's said that can perpetuate her Fame.



A

A

P O E M

To the MEMORY of
Mrs. O L D F I E L D.

Inscrib'd to the Honourable

Brigadier Charles Churchill.

O L D F I E L D's no more! — And can the
Muse forbear
O'er *Oldfield's* Grave to shed a grateful
Tear?

Shall she, the Glory of the *British* Stage,
Pride of her Sex, and Wonder of the Age;
Shall she, who living charm'd th'admiring Throng,
Die undistinguish'd, and not claim a Song?
No. Feeble as it is, I'll boldly raise
My willing Voice to celebrate her Praise,
And with her Name immortalize my Lays.

Had but my Muse her Art to touch the Soul,
Charm ev'ry Sense, and ev'ry Pow'r controul,

A POEM to the

I'd paint her as she was—the Form divine,
 Where ev'ry lovely Grace united shine;
 A Mein, majestick as the Wife of *Jove*,
 An Air, as winning as the Queen of *Love*;
 In every Feature rival Charms should rise,
 And *Cupid* hold his Empire in her Eyes.

O! she was more than Numbers can express,
 Creation's Darling in her fairest Dress.
 A Form so charming, with such Beauties fraught,
 As might have nigh excus'd the Want of Thought;
 And yet a Mind with such Perfections stock'd,
 As made the Beauties of her Form o'erlook'd.
 A Soul with ev'ry Elegance refin'd,
 By Nature, and the Converse of Mankind,
 Wit, which could strike assuming Folly dead;
 And Sense—which temper'd every thing she said;
 Judgment, which ev'ry little Fault could spy;
 But Candor, which would pass a thousand by.
 That native Force—that Energy of Mind,
 Which left the toiling Pedant far behind.
 Such finish'd Breeding, so polite a Taste,
 Her Fancy always for the Fashion past:
 So sweetly serious, so discreetly gay,
 None went unpleas'd, or unimprov'd, away.
 And yet so negligent seem'd of Fame,
 As if she thought Applause beneath her Aim.
 Disdaining Flattery, she was still sincere;
 Warm to approve, and modestly severe.
 Whilst every social Virtue fir'd her Breast,
 To help the Needy, succour the Distrest,
 A Friend to all in Misery she stood.
 And, her chief Pride was plac'd in doing Good.

But say, ye Few, ye happy Few, who e'er
 Enjoy'd the private Friendship of the Fair;
 Who saw the Charmer in a nearer Light,
 All open, free, and unreserv'dly bright;

Who

Memory of Mrs. OLDFIELD. 43

Who felt the Raptures which her Smiles bestow'd,
And prov'd the Joys which from her Converse flow'd:
Oh speak her friendly, affable, and mild,
Brave, generous, firm, by no false Shows beguil'd.
With ev'ry Art and Talent form'd to please,
The Scholars Learning, and the Ladies Ease;
The Gay, the Grave, the Florid and Serene,
Mix'd in her Soul, and sparkling in her Mein.

Thrice happy *Churchill*! who her Love could gain,
For whom so many Thousands sigh'd in vain;
Whose wondrous Charms made every one her Slave:
Dear to the Wise, the Witty, and the Brave.
And justly did she judge to place her Name
With thine, the greatest in the Books of Fame.
Thus join'd, Advantages to each accrue,
Renown to her, Beauty and Wit to you.
Renown should ever on the Fair One wait,
And Beauty be the Portion of the Great.
From such a Pair we well may hope to see
Another *Marlbro'*, *Charles*, appear in thee.

But now, my Muse, the arduous Task engage,
And show the Charming Figure on the Stage,
Describe her Look, her Action, Voice and Mein,
The gay Coquette, soft Maid, or haughty Queen.
So bright she shone in every different Part,
She gain'd despotick Empire o'er the Heart,
Knew how each various Motion to controul,
Sooth every Passion, and subdue the Soul:
As she or gay, or sorrowful appears,
She claims our Mirth, or triumphs in our Tears:
Whilst from her Eyes delusive Sorrows flow,
Our Breasts are touch'd with undissembled Woe;
Or if Ambition calls her forth to Arms,
The Thirst of Glory every Bosom warms;
No Souls so senseless but what felt her Flame,
Nor Breast so savage but her Art could tame.

Ev'n

44 A POEM to the

Ev'n the Pert Templer, and the City Prig,
Who come to Plays to show their Wit—or Wig.
The snarling Critick, and the sneering Beau,
Who neither Sense of Worth, or Manners know,
Aw'd by her Looks their Brutish Din forbear,
And for a while a little Human are.
So *Orpheus* charm'd the Savages of old,
And all Hell's Furies with his Harp controul'd.

Painters may sketch the Image of a Face,
And Sculptors Form and Attitude express;
Poets the Graces of the Mind relate,
And History tells the Actions of the Great.
Still each wants something to compleat the Whole,
The Poet wants a Form, the Painter Soul.
But *Oldfield* all the Heroine display'd,
Show'd how she look'd, she mov'd, she wept, she pray'd, }
And was herself the Character she play'd,
When *Cleopatra's* Form she chose to wear,
We saw the Monarch's Mien, the Beauty's Air;
Charm'd with the Sight, her Cause we strait approve,
And, like her Lover, give up all for Love;
Antony's Fate, instead of *Cæsar's*, chuse,
And wish for her we had a World—to lose.
But when a more familiar Part did please,
Letitia's Artifice, or *Townley's* Ease,
Each Beauty in the finest Light she plac'd,
Improv'd each Charm, and every Action grac'd.
Nay, so enchanting was her lovely Frame,
She spoilt, against her Will, the Poet's Aim;
Making those Follies which we should despise,
When seen in her, seem Virtues in our Eyes.
So, when with *Cytherea's* Girdle bound,
The homeliest Hag, a shining Fair is found.

But now the gay delightful Scene is o'er,
And that sweet Form must glad the World no more;

Relent-

Memory of Mrs. OLDFIELD. 43

Relentless Death has stop'd the tuneful Tongue,
And clos'd those Eyes, for all but Death too strong;
Blasted that Face where every Beauty bloom'd,
And to eternal Rest the graceful Mover doom'd.

Calm and serene she met the fatal Hour,
Smil'd at Death's Terrors, and contemn'd its Power.
Sustain'd unmov'd the cruel Scourge of Pain.
Whilst blund'ring Doctors try'd their Art in vain;
(Those lawful Executioners, whose Skill
Is shewn not when they cure—but when they kill.)
She only griev'd to see her *Churchill* grieve,
And for his Sake alone desir'd to live;
Her long-imprison'd Soul rejoyc'd to see
The wish'd-for Moment come to set it free;
Then bravely struggling leapt its Bounds of Day,
And to the Place from whence it came, impetuous
wing'd its Way.

Thus subterranean Fire in *Etna* pent,
Which long in vain has labour'd for a Vent,
(When once some weaker Part begins to yield
Its long resisted Enemy the Field)
Grows more enrag'd, with double Fury plays,
And once got Air, it mounts into a Blaze.

O'ercharg'd with Sorrow at the Thought—the Muse
Drooping—no more her airy Flight pursues;
With *Oldfield* all her flattering Hopes are fled,
In her the Muses dearest Friend is dead:
For lo! the sinking Stage attends her Fall,
Whilst Opera, Farce, and Trick prevail o'er all,
Wilks, Nature's Master, soon, by Years oppress'd,
And tir'd with Bus'ness, must retire to Rest;
And *Cibber*, baulk'd by the ungrateful Town,
Will lay th'unprofitable Burthen down.
Mourn then, ye Muses! all your Sorrows vent;
Your Shafts are useless, and your Bows unbent.

H

Now

Now weep, ye Forests; droop, ye shady Bowers;
 Be dry, ye Fountains; sicken, all ye Flowers;
 The Night of universal Ign'rance comes,
 In Darkness ev'ry pleasing Scene entombs;
 With Oldfield the last Glympe of Light is fled,
 Wit, Nature, Sense, with her their Exits made;
 The Goddess *Dulness* lifts her cloudy Head,
 And smiles to see her dark Dominion spread,
 Chaos o'er all his Leaden Scepter rears,
 And not one Beam throughout the Gloom appears.

P O S T S C R I P T

London, Oct. 28, 1730.

We have just now seen a POEM advertized in Memo-
 of Mrs. OLDFIELD, which inciting in us a Curiosity
 to peruse it, we found it to be exactly the same with
 one we have had in our Hands ever since Monday last,
 and which we have above inserted.

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